

# Bombay Islam

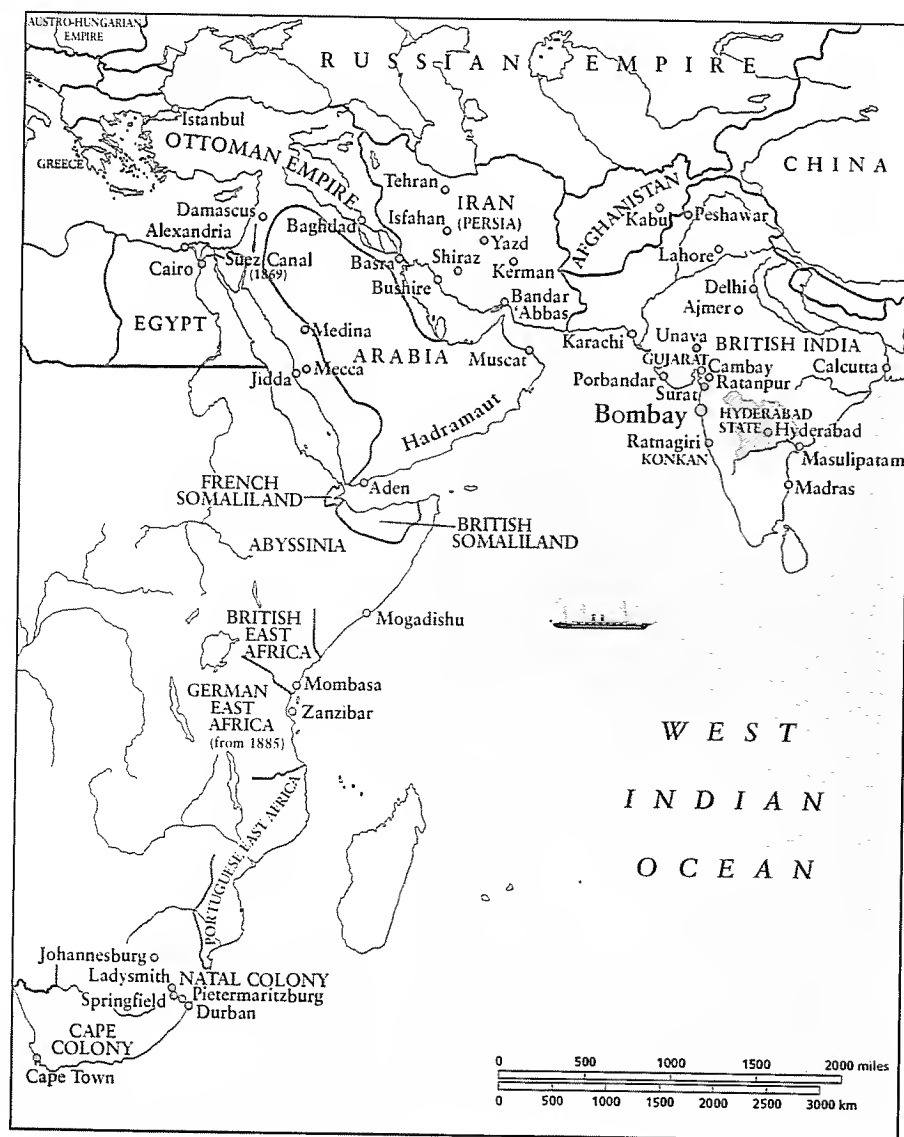
*The Religious Economy of the West  
Indian Ocean, 1840-1915*

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MAP 2. West Indian Ocean Map (c. 1880)

## Introduction

### A RUMOUR OF MIRACLES

At 10.15 on the night of 31 May 1903, the D-block of the recently completed Sita Ram Building in Bombay 'suddenly came down with a crash'.<sup>1</sup> Most of the multi-storey building was unoccupied, but on the ground floor was a saloon bar which over the past months had done a brisk and boozy trade with the port's many British sailors. It was mainly the customers of the bar who made up the dead and injured when the building collapsed. Because the Windsor Bar stood right across the road from the shrine of a Muslim saint, rumours spread quickly that the disaster occurred through an insult to the holy man by the Hindu bar-owner and his bibulous Christian patrons. But for all his defence of the anti-alcoholic norms of *shari'a*, the saint in question was himself something of an oddity. His name was Pedro, and according to urban legend he was a Portuguese sailor who had converted to Islam two centuries earlier. This Pēdrō Shāh was no more commonplace a saint than his feat of levelling a tower block was an act of everyday grace. From his shrine's location in the heart of Bombay's bazaar district, his spectacular miracle was symptomatic of the larger pressures of cosmopolitan modernity that helped create a marketplace of religions in the city surrounding him.

The implications of Pēdrō Shāh's story – that the moral life of the metropolis was regulated by supernatural policemen, that capitalist cosmopolitanism could be undone at the whim of a dead Muslim – have profound implications for the ways in which the trajectories of religion in the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean should be understood, and it is the goal of *Bombay Islam* to unravel these implications. The fact that rumours of

righteous supernatural indignation causing Sita Ram Building to collapse spread so quickly tells us something important about the moral landscapes and vernacular imagination of a city which at the turn of the twentieth century stood at the vanguard of industrialization in both India and the Indian Ocean. For Pēdrō Shāh's cult was not the superstitious detritus of an earlier age, but part of a larger supply of religious productions being generated by the experiences of modern urban life. If such supernatural interventions as that seen in the punishment of the Windsor Bar drinkers are not part of the familiar story of the industrial city, then, like the internationalized Yoga of Swami Vivekananda in Chicago and the scientific table-tappers of Victorian London, they comprised the ruptures and reprises of culture that accompanied the ascent of the no less invisible powers of capital.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time that, in London and Manchester, Marx and Engels were attempting to identify the vast but hidden forces that governed the industrializing process, the labourers and merchants of Bombay were developing their own readings of those powers. Just as the two overseas Germans made their models from the building-blocks of their continental intellectual heritage, so did the Muslims who gathered in Bombay from all around the Indian Ocean resort to their own cultural resources to make sense of their brave new world of cotton mills and dockyards. With its saints and miracles, its theologies and pamphlets, its festivals and schools, Bombay Islam was no less a response to industrial change than the leftist ideologies and working-men's clubs that form the familiar stock-in-trade of the labour historian. If the Methodist, Spiritualist and other alternative Christianities of the proletarian Atlantic are now well known, this book tries to draw from their shadow a parallel oceanic Islam of the industrial era.<sup>3</sup>

While the collapse of Sita Ram Building was an unusually dramatic intervention of enchanted agency in the humdrum life of the city, it was unusual in scale and not kind. For in Bombay and its continental and maritime hinterlands, the new social conditions of modernity were highly receptive to an Islam of holy men and their strange powers. The survival – indeed, the increasing production – of such 'old' religious forms in the industrial epicentre of the Indian Ocean demands a reconsidering of industrial modernity and the ways in which Muslims responded to and experienced it. If the story here is one of Bombay, then it is one of a Muslim city which has long stood in the shadows of other Bombays, whether British, Maharashtrian or Parsi.<sup>4</sup> It is also a story of the oceanic reach of Bombay Islam that through railways to Hyderabad and Gujarat and steamships to Iran and South Africa found markets far beyond the city's own platforms

and quays.<sup>5</sup> As the rumours of a Portuguese Muslim imply, the picture painted by *Bombay Islam* also differs from familiar depictions of other globalizing Asian or African cities of the nineteenth century, where the social and intellectual forms of modernity have been read through secular or national trajectories.<sup>6</sup> Seated similarly in the second carriage is the colonial, for *Bombay Islam* is constructed in the main from indigenous materials that, in reaching beyond the colonial archive, question the scale of imperial influence on the urban lower classes. In focusing on the Indian products of Bombay's 'economy of enchantment', the following chapters place Muslim writings in the trans-regional languages of Persian, Urdu and Arabic at centre stage to explore an industrial and cosmopolitan environment that was at the same time enchanted with imaginaries and energies that industrialization did as much to empower as suppress.

With shipping routes connected together from every direction, such was the city's status as travel hub of the west Indian Ocean that even Muslims making the *hajj* from Africa, Central Asia or Iran found themselves on layover there.<sup>7</sup> Muslim Bombay was to maritime itineraries in the second half of the nineteenth century what Dubai would become to aeroplane journeys in the second half of the twentieth. All underwritten by commerce, these steamship and sailboat networks ferried in African deckhands and Iranian merchants to add to this character as Islam's industrial *carrefour*. Drawing Muslims from far and wide, in the mid-nineteenth century Bombay emerged as the cosmopolis of the Indian Ocean, a global city in which Muslims were forced to deal with the competitive pressures that also shaped its Atlantic counterpart, New York.<sup>8</sup> Bombay's industrialization was signalled to these Muslims in many different ways. Its mechanical advances offered urban visions of a progressive future; its iron printing-presses produced books in Persian and Arabic, English and Urdu, Malay and Swahili; its steam-fed factories created a jostling of new Muslim proletarians; its sheer size allowed Muslims to alternatively discover the collective unity of the *umma* or to learn instead that they were above all 'Indian'. By the mid-nineteenth century, not only was Bombay *urbs prima in Indis* (as its proud citizens were fond of calling it), but also a primary city of Islam.<sup>9</sup> While in the same period Istanbul, Alexandria and Beirut experienced comparable patterns of demographic and cosmopolitan expansion, in scale and speed none could compete with Bombay's industrialized pace of growth, and the oceanic rather than Mediterranean remit of its pluralism. From Africa, India and the Middle East, Bombay attracted Muslim industrial workers; from the small towns of the Konkan came others in their tens of thousands, along with shiploads of Iranian pilgrims whose

journeys to Mecca now involved a stopover of weeks or even months in Bombay. For the Muslim aristocracy of landlocked Hyderabad, Bombay served as a window to the world; for Iranian political and religious exiles as a place of refuge. For a new breed of Muslim missionaries the city's demoralized workforce offered fertile ground for proselytization, while the wealth of its Muslim merchants lent these missionaries the routes and resources to expand beyond Bombay. The city brought together far more linguistically and ethnically diverse Muslim groups than the smaller *dār al-Islām* of the ports of the Mediterranean.

In the earliest major source on Bombay Islam, the Persian *Jān-e Bombā'ī* (Bombay soul), written in 1816, the port was already presented as the crossroads of the world. In addition to the English, Portuguese, Greeks, Dutch, Zoroastrians, Jews, Chinese and the many 'sects' (*farqa*) of Hindus described as residents of the city, *Jān-e Bombā'ī* spoke of a bewildering range of Muslim groups who also lived there: Arabs and Turks, Iranis and Turanis, Sindis and Hindis, Kabulis and Qandaharis, Punjabis and Lahoris, Kashmiris and Multanis, Madrasis and Malabarais, Gujaratis and Dakanis, Baghdadis and Basrawis, Muscatis and Konkanis.<sup>10</sup> These Muslims did not collapse themselves into an indistinguishable and uniform religious community, and the author of *Jān-e Bombā'ī* tells us that each group deliberately made themselves appear different through their forms of dress: 'Every one of them has invented an attractive and different style of tying their turbans (*dastār*) and of curling the locks of their hair in individual ways.'<sup>11</sup> Drawing Muslims from Iran and Iraq, Central Asia and Arabia, as well as every corner of the Indian subcontinent, with its wide pull of visitors Bombay came to serve as the mercantile shadow of Mecca that would in time produce its own Islams in boisterous counterpoint. Bombay's structures of migration were moreover unique in channelling the mass movement of an industrial Muslim workforce and not the smaller flows of technocrats, ideologues and merchants attracted from mid-century to the likes of Istanbul and Alexandria. The gravity of capital thus ensured that the full medley of Muslims from Bombay's vast maritime marketplace was represented on its streets and wharfs. As one of the city's residents described the dazzling assortment of Muslims visible there in 1912:

There, mark you, are many Bombay Mahomedans of the lower class with their long white shirts, white trousers and skull-caps of silk or brocade ... Arabs from Syria and the valley of the Euphrates; half-Arab, half-Persian traders from the Gulf, in Arab or old Persian costumes and

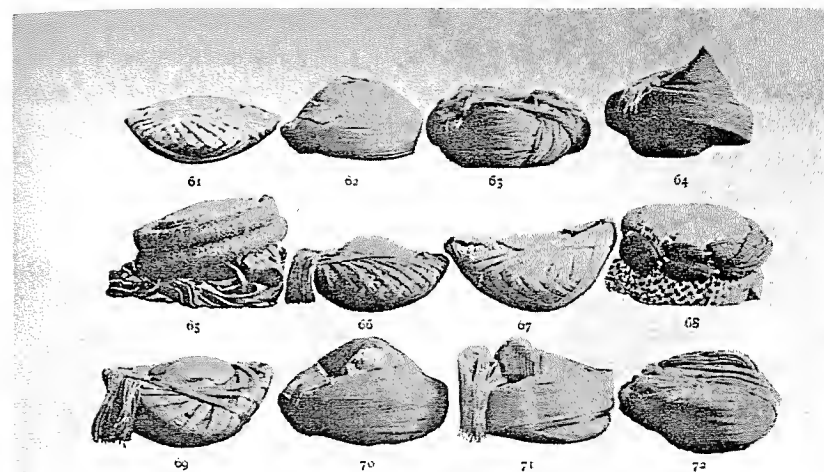


FIGURE 1. Many kinds of Muslim: Samples of Bombay Muslim headdress

black turbans with a red border. Here again comes a Persian of the old school with arched embroidered turban of white silk, white 'aba' or undercoat reaching to the ankles, open grey 'shaya', and soft yellow leather shoe; and he is followed by Persians of the modern school in small stiff black hats, dark coats drawn in at the waist, and English trousers and boots. After them come tall Afghans, their hair well-oiled, in the baggiest of trousers; Makranis dressed like Afghans but distinguished by their sharper nose and more closely-set eyes; Sindis in many buttoned waistcoats; Negroes from Africa clad in striped waist cloths, creeping slowly through the streets and pausing in wonder at every new sight; Negroes in the Bombay Mahomedan dress and red fez ... Malays in English jackets and loose turbans; Bukharans in tall sheep skin caps and woollen gabardines, begging their way from Mecca to their Central Asian homes, singing hymns in honour of the Prophet, or showing plans of the Ka'aba or of the shrine of the saint of saints, Maulana Abdul Kadir Gilani, at Baghdad.<sup>12</sup>

The attractions of the city to these Muslims is self-evident: between 1840 and 1915 Bombay became the third-largest city in the British Empire, the largest port in Asia and, after overtaking Calcutta, the industrial centre of all India and the economic centre of the west Indian Ocean.<sup>13</sup> From the beginning of its great expansion around 1840, Bombay drew Muslims as diverse as the merchants and political exiles of Iran and the rural poor of the surrounding country in the Konkan and Gujarat. From mid-century

onwards, its growth came to rely on migrant labour from its continental hinterland, creating not only a Muslim labour force but huge market demand for religious productions. In 1850 Bombay was already home to around 100,000 Muslims.<sup>14</sup> By 1872 the number had grown to some 137,000, around one-fifth of the city's overall population, and by 1901 over 155,000 Muslims lived there.<sup>15</sup> This position in turn afforded the city's producers and consumers of Muslim religious forms an impact on religious consumption across this vast region. Yet Bombay was not an indiscriminate Muslim melting pot in which difference was dissolved into a single Muslim community demanding a single formation of their faith. In its cosmopolitan environment, different Muslims protected their customary community boundaries; and in the period with which we are dealing, the idea of an Indian Muslim 'nation' or a collective Pan-Islam was still a minority discourse of the privileged and few. Bombay's distinct *mohalla* quarters housed separate *jamā'ats* or communities of Mongol, Irani, Habashi, Konkani, Pathan, Hadhrami, Mēmon, Bohra and Khōja Muslims, who married among their own and kept their working and religious lives in similarly communitarian distinction. The city's mosques were typically affiliated to these community groups: Bombay's oldest, the Jami' Masjīd (founded 1217/1802), was ruled by an exclusive board of Konkani old families, while the Zakariyya Mosque (founded 1238/1823) served only the Mēmon community.<sup>16</sup> In the eighteenth century the many Iranian Shi'ites who gathered in Bombay founded their own mosque in turn, shipping ceramic tiles from their homeland as a visual symbol of their separation. Other Muslim communities had their own distinct places of worship. In such circumstances, Pan-Islamic visions of a single *umma* under Allah were insubstantial indeed, and visions that, in circumstances of increasing religious production, comprised only one of many Islams on offer.

The period between 1840 and 1915 was therefore not only the heyday of Bombay's commercial and industrial dominance over its oceanic and continental hinterlands; it was also a period in which the fracturing effects of a new kind of pluralizing and competitive religious marketplace emerged. For as different Muslim individuals and groups migrated to Bombay, they realized (often for the first time) how different they were from other Muslims. The responses to this predicament with which this book is concerned are not the solutions of the Muslim Nationalists or the Pan-Islamists, even though in the persons of Muhammad 'Alī Jinnāh and Jamāl al-dīn 'al-Afghānī the cosmopolitan pressures of Bombay have a claim to the origins of both ideologies.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the main subject of this

book is the process by which distinctive and often mutually competitive Islams were produced or refined in Bombay, and in some cases exported from there to the far regions of the west Indian Ocean. While Bombay's economy of Islams did not disappear in 1915, as the year before the Bombay lawyer Muhammad 'Alī Jinnāh became president of the Muslim League, that year forms a symbolic end point for our survey. From that period, the new imperatives of nationalism and the search for a unified Indian Muslim 'community' symbolized by Jinnāh pulled Bombay's Muslims in other directions, whether seen in their participation in the nationalism of the Muslim League or the internationalism of the Khilāfat movement. The point at which these larger and self-consciously national or transnational visions of community sought to draw together and 'monopolize' Bombay's plural marketplace of Islams marks the beginning of a different age in the history of the city and the ocean's Muslims. And so, with Jinnāh's rise to political prominence, the symbolic date of 1915 marks a point of closure for this survey. Unlike the leaders of the Pan-Islamist Khilāfat movement and the Islamic nationalist Muslim League, the organizations scrutinized in the following chapters had no interest in toppling the colonial government or creating a new Muslim state, and confined their activities to what, in its ideological and legal contours, colonial modernity had rendered as the private and thereby unregulated sphere of 'religion'.<sup>18</sup> By promoting religious productions that did not contradict the colonial formulation of religion as the private business of individual conscience and community custom, the individuals and groups discussed in the following chapters drew their success from being located in this sphere of 'religion' rendered distinct from 'politics'. Unlike the political activities of the Jinnāhs and the al-Afghānīs, the 'Wahhabis' and the Pirs of Pagaro, which became so thoroughly registered in the imagination and archive of empire as to offer historians the double attraction of being automatically 'important' and abundantly documented in colonial records, the Muslims discussed in *Bombay Islam* left no such imprint in the colonial register and, comprising hagiographies and etiquette manuals, poems and travelogues, prayer-books and contracts, the documentation they left is their own. In this sense, their place in nineteenth-century history is raw: their motivations and status have not been preordained by the colonial information order and its long echoes in academia.<sup>19</sup>

If the production of such unproblematically non-political forms of 'religion' passed under the radar of the colonial state, their neglect belies the efficiency of their producers' response to the displacement and anomie of a new Muslim working class and the moralities and anxieties of an

ascendant Muslim middle class. For, as the earliest steamships in the Indian Ocean entered Bombay's waters in 1825, the first train in Asia departed the city in 1853, and its streets were illuminated by gas lamps a decade later, this oceanic urban herald of industrialization produced forms of enchantment that were no less modern than the ectoplastic enthusiasms of metropolitan London.<sup>20</sup> What the following pages offer is therefore not an account of the kind of Islamic modernity – global and deracinated, rational and individualist, disenchanted and 'Protestant' – that has long been the familiar face of the Muslim nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> For the swifter and cheaper travel of the nineteenth century that enabled this plurality of Islams had only one trajectory in the direction of Pan-Islamism, and the Reformist Islam of a small class of intellectuals was in turn only one response to the new social conditions.<sup>22</sup> While Bombay did help produce such Pan-Islamist and Reformist Islams, the greater number of religious productions to emerge there were made of the same stuff as the tower-block-busting Pēdrō Shāh.<sup>23</sup> Looming large over a market that stretched between Durban, Tehran and Hyderabad, Bombay produced and exported a bewildering supply of Muslim cults and services whose chief attractions were the promise of miracles, intercession and patronage.<sup>24</sup> As late as 1911 an Arab Christian observer could still note of Bombay's Muslims that, 'to the practice of white magic, soothsaying, and the procuring of luck-charms and amulets, they have, like other Moslems, no objection', adding, in a pointer to the economic dimensions of such services, that 'their advisors in soothsaying and witchcraft are poor Saiyids'.<sup>25</sup> In the industrial heart of the west Indian Ocean, such enchanted practices and the 'entrepreneurs' and 'firms' that produced them found a ready market of consumers: among not only the Indian and African workers in the cotton mills and dockyards, but through networks of commerce and labour as far as the towns of Iran and the sugar fields of Natal. For as the following chapters detail, Bombay's Islams were not limited to Bombay itself and, produced by the largest player in a maritime marketplace, spread from the northern to the southern reaches of an oceanic economy of religious exchange.

#### BOMBAY'S RELIGIOUS ECONOMY

As an interpretative model which analyses the holistic interactions of the 'producers' and 'consumers' of religion in a given environment, religious economy (or the economy of religion) offers a way to track the relations of the large numbers and varied types of religiosity that typify complex

modern societies.<sup>26</sup> To use such a model of religious economy is not to make judgements on the ontological or epistemological value of religion, nor is it to reduce religion to solely material or financial forces. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that the model of religious economy is a product of sociological rather than economic thought. The general principle of such analysis is that the complexities of religious activities and interactions are *like* commercial activities and interactions in their capacity to be rendered intelligible through the interpretive model of economy. Further, religious economies are *like* commercial economies in that they constitute a market of potential 'customers' or 'consumers', a set of 'firms' competing to serve that market, and the religious 'products' and 'services' produced or otherwise made available by those firms.<sup>27</sup> As a product of sociological thought, religious economy is concerned with the social life of religion, and as such addresses such fundamental questions as why one type of religiosity flourishes in a certain environment and not another, and how different types (or rival versions of the same type) of religiosity compete with one another. Religion is in this sense conceived as a social and collective enterprise, the result of interactions between different persons. One of the most important aspects of religious economy is therefore the way in which it brings together both the production and consumption dimensions of the social life of religion: the careers of thinkers, prophets or miracle-workers are held to be inseparable from the responses (or lack thereof) of those around them. The model of religious economy also has the advantage of being equally capable of explaining very different trajectories of religious development. In being fundamentally data driven and capable of envisaging a multiplicity of outcomes from the interaction of the participants within its purview, unlike certain forms of classical (particularly Weberian) sociology it avoids teleological explanations of religious development. For these reasons, the model has rich potential for making sense of the social history of religion, particularly in periods and places characterized by religious variety.

Theoretical models are meant to explain complex data and render it comprehensible. Since the model of religious economy was originally developed to explain highly pluralistic religious environments, it is particularly useful in making sense of the vast plethora of Muslim religious organizations or 'firms' that have emerged since the nineteenth century. The latter has usually been seen as a period in which a new Muslim conscience of 'reform' emerged and became increasingly hegemonic as the century progressed.<sup>28</sup> As research has excavated the range of voices and



positions in these nineteenth-century debates, it has become increasingly difficult to discern clear defining positions between them. The implicit heuristic model typically used to map this fracture between 'tradition' and 'reform' is one of a dialogue in which two polemical parties can be distinguished.<sup>29</sup> But as research on the range of parties involved has unearthed a cacophony of voices between which no clear dividing line can be discerned, the model of a dichotomous dialogue seems less and less helpful. It is here that the model of religious economy proves its usefulness. For as the cumulative research of recent decades has demonstrated, what we see in the nineteenth century is not the emergence of a smaller number of dominant religious 'movements' among India's Muslims and of agreement between a small number of theological 'parties', but on the contrary a bewildering array of new religious 'entrepreneurs' and 'firms' whose positions on different subjects overlapped as much as they contradicted one another. The model of dialogue, or two-way debate, simply does not fit the evidence, and has the additional disadvantage of reflecting the self-proclaimed Reformists' own rhetoric by collapsing their opponents into the static and monolithic category of 'tradition'. While standardizing, nationalizing and even globalizing organizations did emerge by the 1900s, so did increasing numbers of sectarian, dissenting and localizing organizations.

In focusing on the city's many Muslim productions – indeed, its many Islams – *Bombay Islam* is concerned with the way in which this larger and newly competitive religious economy both created and exacerbated fractures *within* what are too easily assumed to be either pre-existing religious communities of 'Muslims' or newly unified ones of Muslim Nationalism or Pan-Islamism that emerged in the nineteenth century. While the following chapters do occasionally touch on the more familiar topic of inter-religious competition (as with Bombay's famous Hindu-Muslim riots) they are more concerned with challenging the notion that modernity created more standardized – 'uniform', 'global' or 'national' – forms of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Far from creating such a standardized or homogenous Islam, in the period from 1840 to 1915 at least, in the most industrialized city in the west Indian Ocean, industrialization and capitalist modernity encouraged the creation of an ever-increasing diversity of religious producers and consumers, with the latter made more demanding through their exposure to a growing marketplace of religious products and services. *Bombay Islam* was not one kind of religious production, but many.

What is seen overall in the nineteenth century is therefore a massive increase in Muslim religious production. In part, as in the case of Bombay,

this came through the availability of new technologies of communication and reproduction (steam travel, printing) and the creation of new and old forms of social organization (missions, associations, brotherhoods). What emerged from this increasing production of religious sites, texts, persons, practices and organizations is not the clarity of the dialogue but the cacophony of the marketplace. In contrast to Weberian sociology or modernization theory, the principles of religious economy maintain that whether scriptural or charismatic, individualist or collectivist, none of these different Islams was intrinsically any more 'modern' than its competitors. Unlike in the formulations of classical sociology and its heirs in contemporary globalization theory, the model of religious economy helps explain the persistence of forms of religiosity that appear to contradict the familiar trajectories of socio-historical development. For in the most industrialized, technological and cosmopolitan city of the west Indian Ocean, the most successful religious productions were not 'modern', disenchanted, 'Protestant' Islams, but cults that were enchanted, hierarchical and ritualistic. They were neither uniform in characteristics nor cosmopolitan in outlook, but highly differentiated and parochially communitarian. They were neither reformed nor modernist, but customary and traditionalist. While conventional theory fails to explain their success – indeed, expansion – the model of religious economy at least offers the elegance of simplicity: they succeeded because they satisfied the demands of a wide range of consumers.

Since religious economies emerge from the interactions of the religious 'producers' and 'consumers' in any place and period, the model of religious economy could also be applied to maritime and continental India before the nineteenth century. Different religious economies – monopolistic or liberal, active or stagnant, closed or connected – emerge in different periods and places. What this book argues was specific to the period and place it surveys was the emergence in Bombay from around 1840 of a new kind of pluralistic, competitive and 'liberal' religious economy. This new nexus of production, interaction and consumption – or, more simply, this marketplace – emerged through the collusion of several distinct but overlapping factors. The primary enabling factor in the emergence of Bombay's new religious marketplace was the colonial deregulation of religious interactions. In theory at least, the colonial government operated according to the liberal principle of non-interference in religious affairs. Having its origins in the mercantilist attitudes of the East India Company, the principle was gradually formalized in legislation that culminated in Act XX of 1863, which formally banned the colonial government from

direct support or control over religious institutions. In terms of social (that is, market) administration, this official policy of non-interference shaped a religious economy in which the state promised and largely appeared not to intervene to favour one competitor in the marketplace over another. This was a significant factor, for as the sociologist Rodney Stark has noted, 'to the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic'.<sup>31</sup> If the subtle religious pressure or indirect interference of the colonial administration has been well charted by various scholars, this was not the same as overt control; and when it did intervene in the market in Bombay the government was as likely to do so on behalf of indigenous religious parties as British ones. While the colonial government was therefore not always true to its liberal principles, except in exceptional circumstances (when, as in Chapter 5, colonial law could be called on to assist Muslim no less than Christian groups), the state was not a significant visible player in the economy.

This was particularly true of Bombay compared to the role of the colonial state in such cities as Delhi or Lucknow, where pre-colonial histories of Muslim settlement and rule had created *waqf* endowments and other forms of financial support. The lack of a substantial pre-colonial history of Bombay left little such legacy for the state to interfere with by way of religious buildings or endowments. By the same token, this laissez-faire policy did enable the entry into the Indian marketplace of sophisticated and wealthy foreign 'firms' by way of Christian missionary societies possessing new forms of religious technology in terms of organizational infrastructure and vernacular printing equipment. As the missionary firms expanded in Bombay from the 1820s onwards, their conception of 'religions' as having relational exchange values in which the characteristics, ethics and even utilitarian value of different 'religions' could be compared and chosen between by the rational religious consumer acted as both an ideological and organizational catalyst that furthered the degree of competition in the religious economy.

In this way, the foreign missionaries triggered responses from indigenous religious firms, whether old priestly families or new reforming associations, who borrowed the Christians' techniques and methods, particularly with regard to vernacular printing. The outcome of this dual pattern of governmental deregulation and the arrival of missionary firms was not only the increasing pluralism of a religious market from which none were excluded, but also the competitiveness brought by missionary polemic and counter-missionary apology. Initiated by the vexed collusion of liberal colonial rules on religious toleration and missionary conceptions of the exchangeability of religious affiliation, Bombay's religious



FIGURE 2. Muslims from far and wide: Bombay cafeteria scenes, c. 1890



marketplace became an increasingly plural and competitive arena as the nineteenth century progressed. Given the dominant role of India – and particularly the commercial and administrative elites of Bombay in an Indian Ocean that has been conceived as a sub-imperial 'Indian Empire' in its own right – this blend of imperial deregulation and evangelical opportunism reached beyond the shores of India herself.<sup>32</sup> Whether in British domains in East and South Africa, or in independent regions such as Zanzibar and Iran, through the increasing interactions of the nineteenth century and the role of Bombay within them, to a greater or lesser degree the Bombay religious economy was replicated and its productions exported overseas. By way of example, at the northern and southern ends of this oceanic marketplace later chapters take as case studies Bombay's religious traffic with Iran and South Africa. While it is not the aim of this book to portray Bombay as the sole agent in the creation of a religious economy that transformed every corner of the west Indian Ocean, it hopes to present Bombay as the largest urban player in a religious economy that was inter-continental in its extent.

After the 'liberal' colonial conditions and the arrival of missionary 'catalysts', the other major factor in the creation of Bombay's religious economy was the concentration there of a diverse body of religious producers and consumers.<sup>33</sup> The Muslim demographic of this religious economy reflected the sheer volume of Muslim migration to the city from a catchment area that stretched from Gujarat and Hyderabad to Mombasa, Mecca and Shiraz. For the emergence of the city as the economic centre of the west Indian Ocean created a complex pattern of demographic change, concentrating Muslim capitalists in a new industrialized setting at the same time that it attracted a vast rural workforce to its mills and dockyards and created a new middle class of professionals and compradors. It was not only occupation and wealth that divided Bombay's Muslims, but language, ethnicity and place of origin. As one Bombay Muslim explained to readers of *The Times of India* in 1908, 'the most essential fact to be learnt about the Mahomedan community of Bombay is that there is no such community. There are various communities in this city which profess this religion.'<sup>34</sup> After the 'deregulation' of the economy and the 'kickstart' entry of the missionary firms, the third major element in the creation of this plural and competitive religious economy was therefore the presence of a large and diverse market of Muslim religious consumers, whose tastes lent shape to the city's religious productions emerging from the supply side. Moving into Bombay in large numbers, and distanced from the religious products of their homelands, the decisions made by these religious consumers and

the responses of the producers who supplied them were the crowning factor in the creation of a thriving religious economy.

With so many Muslims brought together in this way (many of them from socially and religiously homogeneous village environments), Bombay's cosmopolitanism afforded new possibilities of *comparison* between the many different beliefs and practices on display there. The step between the social visibility of religious variety and individual acts of inspection and comparison can be seen in action in as early a source as the 1816 Persian *Jān-e Bombā'ī*, which included in its panoptical survey of Bombay keen descriptions of the religious practices of each of the city's religious groups, before comparing and commenting on their respective degrees of enlightenment and civilization.<sup>35</sup> Such acts of comparison were even more powerful between members of what were nominally the same but in practical terms quite different religious groups. Illusions of Muslim social or theological unity quickly dissolved when different Muslim communities came together in Bombay. Whether between 'co-religionists' or members of more transparently different religious communities, these acts of everyday comparison were an important factor in the creation of a more plural and competitive religious economy. For to compare is to relativize, to make subjective judgements of value and ultimately to make choices. The sum total of such individual acts of comparison fed the motors of competition that led in turn to further religious production.

These issues of comparison, choice and competition point towards the changes being wrought in nineteenth-century Bombay that separate its religious economy from those of earlier periods. For while modernity should not be simplistically equated with individualism, a variety of factors did emerge in the period covered in this book that placed religion increasingly into the hands of individuals as both wage-earning consumers and 'entrepreneurial' new producers.<sup>36</sup> In this, there were many factors at work. Partly this individualization emerged through the petty surpluses of cash that new wage-earners could spend on religious products and services; partly through Christian missionary promotion of an ideology of religious choice and individual conversion. Partly it emerged through the spread of printing and private access to religious texts and ideas; partly through the arrival in Bombay of religious entrepreneurs supplying new productions and services. The aggregate of these new social forces encouraged an individualization of patterns of religious 'consumption' in the metropolis that was guided by thousands of private acts of comparison and choice. The majority of changes in patterns of religious consumption that Muslims made were between different Islamic productions rather than changes

('conversions') between the larger 'brand groups' of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, even though each of these 'brands' was itself characterized by increasing and pluralizing production in Bombay.<sup>37</sup> The relatively small number of 'conversions' that vexed the Christian missionaries therefore belied the larger pattern of comparison and change that occurred within such larger 'brand groups' as Islam. For as more and more Islamic products and services became available in Bombay, Muslims 'consumed' them as rational agents, comparing different religious products or services on the basis of their explicability or usefulness to their own lives.<sup>38</sup>

If this diverse Muslim population speaks to the demand and consumption side of the economy, then what were the religious 'products' and 'services' that were generated in Bombay, and who were their 'producers' and 'suppliers'? In outline, products and services could take the form of pilgrimages and rituals, printed books and preachers' doctrines, moral consolations and bodily cures, as well as the persons and cults of the intercessionary holy men whose charisma was no less the production of the new economy. For in a context of diverse patterns of religious consumption, religious producers increasingly differentiated their persons no less than their products and services as offering rival paths to salvation in the hereafter – or, no less often, in the here and now. As the following chapters show, their miraculous productions and charismatic marketing techniques appealed to the demands of the industrial labourers and expatriate merchants brought to Bombay by the lure of capital. The production and distribution of these new religious products and services also relied on the industrial technologies of steam travel and vernacular printing, technologies which offered new avenues of propaganda and advertisement for holy men and their impresarios. If for heuristic purposes the main religious productions discussed in *Bombay Islam* can be grouped together beneath the larger market 'trends' towards Reformist and Customary Islam described below, at ground level these 'firms' comprised a fourfold spectrum of organizational formats.

Seen over the following chapters are four basic types of religious firm operating from Bombay. Despite the rhetoric that the more self-consciously Modernist of these firms supplied, the vast majority of firms operated on the family business model, in which control over their symbolic and capital resources was shared primarily along the horizontal stratum of brothers and male cousins, and transferred along the vertical stratum of fathers and sons. For the sake of brevity, the four major types of firm can be labelled the *anjuman*, *jamā'at*, brotherhood and shrine. The *anjuman* or 'association' was the newest organizational type of firm, typically

governed by a board of directors and supported by subscriptions or other modes of formalized charity. The *jamā'at* or 'community' comprised a customary form of an endogamous religious group over which one or more different leaders might struggle for hereditary or, more rarely, elective leadership. Most often associated with the Sufi orders, the brotherhood (or *tariqa*, literally 'way') was a customary form of voluntary association characterized by the authoritarian and charismatic rule of a living holy man who (depending on his success) expanded the reach of his firm through the distribution of 'deputies' (*khulafā*) to attend to his different constituencies of followers. Finally, shrine firms were centred on the mausolea of saintly holy men (often, but by no means always, Sufis) and, depending on the degree of success that a particular descendant of the saint had over other descendants, were controlled by one or more descendants of the saint in question. Since shrines represented the most concretely localized type of firm, they were often also linked to brotherhoods as a means of expanding the geographical reach of the shrine towards wider consumer bases. However, in densely populated urban environments, shrines had the advantage over other types of firm of having a highly visible and recognizable physical presence which, when combined with long-standing beliefs that such Muslim saints distributed their charisma equally to all, allowed them to potentially attract larger and more religiously diverse sets of consumers than any other firm.

Despite the kin-based popularity of the family business model, the organizational format and strategies of outreach that these firms applied varied considerably, and these were important factors in their relative success. While *anjuman* firms comprised new kinds of modern associations with formal agendas, philanthropic programmes, membership dues and newsletters, the organization of shrine firms ranged from individual entrepreneurs who established 'franchise' shrines connected to parent shrines elsewhere to larger pilgrimage centres and communities of charisma organized on the model of the hereditary family business. While the services of individual wandering *faqīr* mendicants did contribute to the religious economy, more effective were those holy men associated with the organizational framework of the brotherhood, whose customs of hierarchy and discipleship are seen in following chapters providing an effective framework for expansion between Bombay, Durban and Tehran. Through using new technologies and techniques to reach the vast Muslim marketplace in the city and its hinterlands, it was ultimately such customary religious firms of individuals and families operating through charismatic shrines and brotherhoods that emerged as the

most successful and characteristic firms of Bombay's Muslim religious economy.

The success of these customary firms points to the fact that market conditions do not necessarily favour innovation. Even if in his essay on 'The Harms in the Observance of Customs', the great Indian Reformist Sayyid Ahmad Khān declared around 1875 that 'the observance of customs is everywhere an obstacle to progress', when faced with the entrepreneurial deployment of familiar religious customs, the sheer novelty of the Reformists' Islam was an impediment to success.<sup>39</sup> In a competitive marketplace, the familiarity and security of custom therefore served to recommend certain religious productions as 'tried and tested', playing into the hands of the customary intercessors and holy men rather than the Reformists, even if many of these customary individuals and firms were entrepreneurial *arrivistes* in their own right. So there was nothing contradictory in the fact that so many of Bombay's religious consumers preferred the familiarly enchanted forms of their forefathers to the disenchanted productions of the Reformists. It is on this basis that Bombay's religious economy can be characterized as an 'economy of enchantment'.

Finally, it is important to note that whatever the confines of the present study, the processes it maps did not apply uniquely to Bombay's Muslims. While the colonial administration applied its laissez-faire policy to all regions of India under its control, its enabling role in the creation of a plural and competitive religious market in Bombay was all the greater for the vast influx to the city of different religious groups from around the Indian Ocean no less than India itself. The unprecedented level of interaction afforded by the cosmopolitanism of what was by the early 1900s a million-strong industrial city affected every group that came there, Hindu and Zoroastrian no less than Christian, Jewish and Muslim. Through such organizations as the Manav Dharma Sabha, founded in 1844 by Durgaram Mehtaji Dave (1809–76), the Āryā Samāj, founded in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati (1824–83) and the many lesser-known organizations that spread out to the Hindu diaspora in Africa no less than Gujarat and Maharashtra, Bombay was as important to the new Hindu religious economy as it was to the Muslim.<sup>40</sup> As Jews from various regions in India, Iran and the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire seeking refuge or commerce converged in Bombay, the city also came to play an important role in the reconstruction of Jewish religiosity in the city's wider oceanic arena.<sup>41</sup> As shown in Chapter 4, the city was also the source of an unprecedented level of Zoroastrian religious productivity, which was in turn exported

to Iran.<sup>42</sup> Bombay's Muslim religious economy, then, was part of a larger multi-religious economy from which it borrowed in various ways.

#### LABELS FOR AN ECONOMY OF ISLAM

Where the collective weight of scholarship suggests that the nineteenth century belonged to the Muslim Reformists, *Bombay Islam* places these players into the same marketplace alongside the customary purveyors of enchantment who were no less attuned to the industrial age. In place of the term 'Sufism', the following chapters use the category of 'Customary Islam' to refer to the patterns of Muslim religiosity that, while evolving in the centuries before the emergence of the more competitive religious economy of the nineteenth century, still held sufficient – and indeed expanded – appeal in the new conditions so as to be successfully reproduced for new sets of consumers. Yet in Bombay's competitive religious economy, such reproducers of custom could not pass on their Islam unchanged. The model of custom put to use here echoes E. P. Thompson's understanding of the customary idioms of English labour groups, for whom custom was less a static entity than a 'pool of diverse resources' whose various usages placed custom in a creative tension of perpetuity and change.<sup>43</sup> In industrializing India likewise, change was an integral part of even the reproduction of custom, in some cases by ensuring larger public approval through self-consciously 'Islamic' behaviour when visiting shrines or emphasizing the harmony between custom and *shari'a*.<sup>44</sup> In the rapidly changing urban environment of Bombay, there was therefore never any simplistic perpetuation of custom, and the strategies and mechanisms of its reproduction by Customary Islamic firms are examined in the case studies of the following chapters.

Against a historiographical drama in which Reform has long held centre stage, *Bombay Islam* argues that in industrializing oceanic India, Reformist Islam was only a marginal player in the period under scrutiny. As a result, in Bombay and its wider marketplace relatively few Customary Islamic firms felt the need to expressly respond to the 'threat' of Reform, and for these generally later organizations the label 'Counter Reform' is adopted. The picture was different in continental North India, arguably because, stuck with a diminishing economy of agricultural landholdings and a rural or provincial service class clientele, Customary Islamic trends there lacked the oceanic economy of industry and commerce that in Bombay sustained the market for Customary Islam so well.<sup>45</sup> It was therefore in the north

that from the 1880s the most important Counter Reform organization began to emerge by way of the 'Barelwi' *madrasa* network established by Sayyid Ahmad Rizā Khān of Bareilly (d. 1340/1921).<sup>46</sup> A classic example of the logic of Counter Reform, his Ahl-e Sunnat organization has been described as 'reformist in the self-consciousness of its practice, and in its insistence on following the sunna of the Prophet at all times'.<sup>47</sup> While through such organizations Counter Reform became an important element in India's overall religious economy by 1900, and some of Bombay's Muslim reproducers of custom similarly voiced its apologetic and self-modificatory logic, for the most part what flourished in Bombay was an economy of enchantment in which Customary Islam felt little competition from the city's limited number of Reformists.

While the labels Customary, Reformist and Counter Reformist Islam are helpful, they should not be reified as constituting coherent 'movements', and are used here as heuristic labels to designate widespread but often quite disparate and internally competing 'trends' within the market. Such was the competitive logic of the new economy that, despite the similarities they pose to the observer, Reformist firms frequently opposed one another, as did Customary Islamic firms. What can be observed therefore remained first and foremost a marketplace of many distinct competing organizations and individuals, albeit a market in which certain larger trends towards Reform and Customary Islam can be observed from the outside.

#### THE ECONOMY OF RELIGION AND THE HISTORY OF LABOUR

Compared to the more richly culturalist historiography of labour that has developed over the past half-century with regard to Britain and the United States, for the nineteenth century at least the literature on Indian labour history presents a far less detailed picture of the interface between labour and culture. Although excuses can be made about the relative paucity of sources for India rather than the Anglosphere, the fact is that India's industrialization in the nineteenth century led to the production of an unprecedented array of printed materials in almost every vernacular language of the subcontinent. While many of these emerged from the bailiwick of the middle class, there were also large numbers of chap-books produced for those lower down the social scale. This was particularly the case in large Indian urban environments, where the mid-1800s saw the emergence of thriving print markets geared towards the tastes of the urban masses.<sup>48</sup> If Bombay offers a similar abundance of such printed and otherwise written materials, then written documentation is not the

only source material that the city offers onto the religio-cultural imagination of its workforce. For while texts were one kind of religious production that emerged from Bombay's religious economy, from festivals and musical gatherings to healing practices and new forms of sociability, there were also many other kinds of religious production that emerged in the city in response to the demand of the urban masses. It is here too that the model of religious economy proves its value, for in showing how religious products are the result of the interaction between consumer groups and the suppliers competing for their support, the model presents a variety of evidence for the cultural life of the city's labouring groups by way of religious productions created in response to the demand of the lower-class consumer.

Given the fact that the greater proportion of Bombay's Muslims consisted of the new industrial workforce that the city pioneered, the study of the religious consumption of a new Muslim working class contributes to long-standing debates in labour history, in particular on the place of 'custom' in labour culture. For the religious idioms that appealed to the Muslim labour groups that emerged in Bombay during the nineteenth century were writ through with customary hierarchies that governed the metaphysical no less than the social and political imagination.<sup>49</sup> The patterns of the inheritance and reproduction of Indian labour culture were quite different from those imagined by Marx and the early E. P. Thompson: this was not the egalitarian inheritance of the 'liberty tree' that Thompson saw behind the English workers' movements of the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In spite of this distinction, the religious productions consumed by Bombay's Muslim labourers did hold in common with English labour culture an emphasis on custom, which the later Thompson saw as the labourers' 'rhetoric of legitimation for almost any usage, practice or demanded right'.<sup>51</sup> From a comparative perspective, it is this shared idiom of the customary rather than its distinct egalitarian or inegalitarian expressions that appears as the more general characteristic of labour culture.

Yet the customary idioms that appealed to Muslim labour groups were not the sole resource of the labourer, and were often most effectively mobilized by wealthy religious entrepreneurs and merchant groups. Such was the hierarchical character of the symbolic resources of custom (*dastūr*, 'ādāt, *rasm*) that the production of a metaphysically elevated 'leader' (and not a 'representative' *primus inter pares*) was a necessary element of customary productions, whether they originated among labour or merchant groups. One of the key contentions of this book is that the religious productions, and thereby the larger history, of such groups cannot be easily

separated. For as the following pages show, in an economy of religious enchantment relying on the client-patron ties of the devotee and saint, the religious economy of both labour and merchant groups was typically interactive – and at times mutually dependent. The empowerment lent to such inegalitarian customs by the capitalist enterprises of Bombay helps explain the survival among workers in colonial Calcutta of the ‘precapitalist, inegalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties of community, language, religion, caste and kinship’ that was problematized by Dipesh Chakrabarty.<sup>52</sup> For such customs did not simply ‘survive’: in the religious economy of an industrializing environment they were reproduced more efficiently than ever. By pointing towards the continuing, if protean, importance of custom among the Muslim workers of Bombay, *Bombay Islam* therefore hopes to move beyond the search for emblematically ‘modern’ forms of labour organization that until recently typified the study of Indian labour.<sup>53</sup> Seen in this light, the body of vernacular materials drawn together in this book provides the kind of index and archive of nineteenth-century working-class life that has so far eluded historians of Indian labour.<sup>54</sup>

By inspecting the Muslim corner of one of the most productive religious economies to emerge in the nineteenth century, *Bombay Islam* suggests that the conditions of industrial modernity did not necessarily lead to fewer ‘Reformist’, ‘uniform’ or ‘globalized’ religious forms any more than they favoured processes of rationalization and disenchantment.<sup>55</sup> Looking at a specific religious economy that centred on Bombay demonstrates how industrialization created a range of social conditions for its different participants that in turn shaped a diverse and often contradictory set of religious demands. While an English-educated comprador class demanded a ‘Protestant’ Islam of scripture and sobriety, the workers in their warehouses sought a religion of carnival holidays and practical little miracles.<sup>56</sup> The increasing social complexity of a cosmopolitan and class-differentiated capitalist city thus found expression in increasing religious production and diversification rather than standardization. But among the many religious productions that emerged from Bombay’s oceanic shipyard of modernity between 1840 and 1915, the most successful trend to emerge was that of Customary Islam. Despite having roots in the pre-industrial past, the reproductions of custom created by Bombay’s Customary Islamic ‘firms’ spread widely due to their resonance with the working conditions of industrial capitalism and its broken social landscape of individuals uprooted from their ancestral backgrounds. For

many Muslims, a world with no helper other than a distant Allah was a lonely world indeed. With their shrines and lodges near the cotton mills of Bombay and the plantations of Natal, the charismatic shaykhs who form the focus of *Bombay Islam* were infinitely closer to their clients than a faceless and absent God. Led by spiritual aristocrats, patronized by wealthy merchants and consumed by labourers, the religious productions traced in the following chapters were not simply ‘popular Islam’, and expressed themselves in a plethora of modern printed genres, from newspapers and travelogues to biographies and guidebooks. Powered by the new social and technological forces of labour migration and steam travel, they were not merely ‘local Islam’ either. Like the maritime cults of Muslim Tamil migrants in colonial Singapore, the stories of European vampires that followed African labourers into the mines of the Copper Belt, and the movement of fortune-telling promoters of the ‘refugee god’ Wong Tai Sin to Hong Kong harbour, these were forms of religion that were inseparable from the mass labour migrations that transformed Asian and African societies in the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup>



## Notes

### Introduction

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#### 1. Missionaries and Reformists in the Market of Islams

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15. Wilson, *Musulmānī dīn kā rad'iyya*, pp. 2–12.
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